

Homily 14th Sunday Ordinary Time 2024

A primary school teacher was covering The Infancy of Jesus with her children, In order to reinforce the lesson of The Flight into Egypt she asked the class to draw the event. As the children worked away, she noted that although most were drawing Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus and the traditional donkey little Johnny was taking a different angle. She observed Johnny had drawn an aeroplane with passengers visibly seen at the windows of the plane. Intrigued the teacher enquired: 'What are you drawing Johnny?' 'Miss it's the flight into Egypt!' he exclaimed with enthusiasm. 'And who is that at the windows of the plane?', asked the teacher. 'Oh Miss', pointing to the three passengers '...that's Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus.' And who is that up front in the cockpit then, Johnny?', she asked. 'Oh Miss that's Pontius the Pilot!'

Just as the Holy family had to flee for fear of King Herod, many an Old Testament prophet had to flee the anger of the Jewish leaders as they spoke God's word which was often unpalatable for them. The prophet Ezekiel was one such prophet and in today's First Reading he is called by God: 'Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to the rebels who have turned against me. Till now they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me. The sons are defiant and obstinate; I am sending you to them, to say, "The Lord says this." Whether they listen or not, this set of rebels shall know there is a prophet among them.'

In today's Gospel from St Mark Jesus flees from his own townsfolk. St Luke's parallel and fuller account describes how Jesus goes into the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath Day. He unfolds the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and proclaims: 'The spirit of The Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to give good news to the poor, to give sight to the blind, to set prisoners and the downtrodden free and to go tell everyone that God's Kingdom is among them.' Jesus then rolls up the scroll and says, 'Today in your midst this prophecy is fulfilled!'. The Pharisees and the synagogue officials, angered by such a blasphemy (Jesus was ostensibly claiming to be God's Son) take him by the scruff of the neck and are about to throw him from a nearby cliff to his death when Jesus flees from them,

'Prophets are never accepted in their own country' and St Paul in today's Second Reading reinforces that stating: 'So I shall be very happy to make my weaknesses my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me, and that is why I am quite content with my weaknesses, and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong.'

I think I shared with you before how a wise and holy priest once told me, 'John there are enough priests and enough teachers, but we are lacking in Prophets to straighten out The Church!' Ezekiel, Paul and Jesus all spoke out against, injustices, defiance, obstinacy, hypocrisy, greed and the failure to look after and remove 'heavy burdens' from 'the flock' by those entrusted to do so by God. As stated in last week's homily ALL of us disciples have a choice to make, to either stand up and be counted for the Jesus of The Gospel or to be content in following a Jesus made in men's image and likeness, accepting a Kingdom based on power, status, legalism, money and lavish spending all of which have absolutely nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth.